

SENATE BILL 2443

By Kurita

AN ACT to name a segment of State Route 374 (101st North Parkway) in Montgomery County in honor of First Sergeant Lawrence N. Koontz, United States Army, Retired.

WHEREAS, since the birth of our great nation, hundreds of thousands of brave American men and women have served their country in the United States Armed Forces, defending the most inviolate principles of human freedom and democracy; and

WHEREAS, their meritorious service has continued the time-honored tradition of Tennessee volunteerism; and

WHEREAS, throughout the years, the intrepid and valiant members of the United States Armed Forces have continued to inspire our confidence, loyalty, and support; and

WHEREAS, from Valley Forge to Iraq and the war-torn lands of Southeast Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, our armed forces have unselfishly paid the price of freedom for their friends and families and for all of us; and

WHEREAS, it is most appropriate that we should honor those courageous men and women who have made many sacrifices to preserve the blessed freedoms we enjoy today and that our progeny will hopefully continue to cherish for generations to come; and

WHEREAS, retired First Sergeant (E-8) Lawrence Norman Koontz, United States Army, was born in Keyser, West Virginia on July 7, 1934, and has been a resident of Montgomery County for approximately forty years; and

WHEREAS, Sergeant Koontz was assigned to Vietnam during the following periods: 8 July 1965 – 20 May 1966 and 14 December 1967 – 30 October 1968. During these periods of service, he distinguished himself and received the following awards: Silver Star with 2<sup>nd</sup> Oak

Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star with "V" Device 6<sup>th</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart, and Army Commendation Medal with "V" Device 3<sup>rd</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster; and

WHEREAS, on 2 September 1965, Staff Sergeant Koontz distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous action in the Republic of Vietnam. His unit was on a search and destroy operation when his platoon leader was mortally wounded by hostile fire. Sergeant Koontz immediately took charge and ran under heavy enemy fire from position to position to place his men under cover and direct their fire. When the medical evacuation helicopter arrived and was about to land in the wrong area, Sergeant Koontz ran into the open and completely exposed himself to hostile fire to direct the aircraft to a safe landing area. He then led his platoon in the assault of the strongly defended Viet Cong positions. Sergeant Koontz's actions so inspired the other members of the platoon that the objective was taken and the enemy driven from the hill; and

WHEREAS, Platoon Sergeant Koontz distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 25 January 1966, in the Republic of Vietnam. When his Recondo Platoon was effectively pinned down by intense enemy sniper fire, Sergeant Koontz, unmindful of the great danger to himself, personally led two men across two hundred meters of open area in an assault on the enemy's flank. The heavy fire Sergeant Koontz and his men placed on the enemy forced them to concentrate their fire on the assaulting troopers and enabled the platoon to move to cover. The Viet Cong, startled by the fearless assault initiated and led by Sergeant Koontz, fled from their entrenched positions and disappeared into the jungle; and

WHEREAS, having been given the mission of securing a landing zone deep in Viet Cong infested jungle late in the afternoon of 28 February 1966, Platoon Sergeant Koontz moved toward his objective 8000 meters away. After moving approximately 3000 meters, the two point squads suddenly came under hostile fire. Sergeant Koontz quickly and expertly led two squads from the rear around the embattled front squads in an effort to out-flank the enemy. Shortly

after moving toward his new objective, his element came under a hail of enemy fire. With his element and the point squads pinned down by automatic weapon and machine gun fire, Sergeant Koontz organized an assault on the entrenched enemy. When this failed and it became apparent that his whole force was surrounded, Sergeant Koontz grabbed a M60 machine gun and tried to infiltrate the enemy defenses. He became the target of several enemy automatic weapons. Forced to crawl, Sergeant Koontz continued his daring assault and reached the enemy lines. His ammunition expended, and the enemy regrouping for a charge, Sergeant Koontz then returned to his platoon. He again started out by himself, with a fresh load of ammunition, this time assaulting a weaker portion of the enemy defenses. His men, inspired to great heights by this extraordinary act of gallantry, rushed forward and overran the bewildered Viet Cong. After extraction of the wounded, the Recondo platoon then reorganized and continued their mission toward the landing zone. Shortly before reaching the main objective, Sergeant Koontz inadvertently stepped on a punji stake; however, he told no one of his injury; and

WHEREAS, Platoon Sergeant Koontz distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 25 March 1966 while serving as a member of a patrol on a combat operation in the Republic of Vietnam. While moving toward their objective, Platoon Sergeant Koontz's patrol received intense hostile fire. Platoon Sergeant Koontz, with complete disregard for his safety, repeatedly exposed himself to the Viet Cong fire to better direct his men and point out targets to them. During the course of action, Platoon Sergeant Koontz dauntlessly charged a Viet Cong emplacement and one insurgent ran into the dense jungle. With determination, Platoon Sergeant Koontz continued to rush forward, and captured a Viet Cong Soldier. After Sergeant Koontz returned him to friendly lines and questioned him, the prisoner voluntarily talked two of his comrades into surrendering and provided higher headquarters with valuable information; and

WHEREAS, Platoon Sergeant Koontz distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 14 April 1966, while on a Recon patrol in the Republic of Vietnam. When his platoon was suddenly engaged by intense enemy fire, Sergeant Koontz, without hesitation, aggressively charged the Viet Cong's positions and forced them to flee. His courageous and professional actions under fire were an inspiring example to his men; and

WHEREAS, on 10 May 1966, Platoon Sergeant Koontz distinguished himself while serving as platoon sergeant on a combat operation. While moving toward their objective, the lead element of his platoon received intense hostile fire. Platoon Sergeant Koontz ran to the front of his platoon to reorganize his men. During the course of action, he dauntlessly exposed himself to direct Viet Cong fire while carrying a fallen comrade. Shortly after this, the Viet Cong launched a determined assault on his position. Braving almost certain death, Platoon Sergeant Koontz immediately charged the assaulting Viet Cong at extremely close range. Aggressively continuing his assault, Platoon Sergeant Koontz single-handedly repelled the Viet Cong attack. He then personally led five men in an assault to expand the perimeter. The Viet Cong fire became more intense and Platoon Sergeant Koontz was seriously wounded. Although in great pain, he refused medical attention and continued to direct his troops in their assault. Sergeant Koontz's unimpeachable valor in close combat against a numerically superior Viet Cong force was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon him and his unit; and

WHEREAS, on 29 March 1968, First Sergeant Koontz distinguished himself while serving as the First Sergeant during a combat operation. His unit was taken under an intense barrage of hostile small arms and automatic weapon fire while moving down a trail into a Viet Cong village. First Sergeant Koontz immediately organized a rescue team to extract the wounded personnel. Despite the hail of enemy fire, which continued to rake the ground, the rescue, under the precise direction and astute leadership of First Sergeant Koontz, successfully

evacuated the casualties from the bullet-swept area. A platoon leader was mortally wounded as a result of rounds which originated from a hostile bunker. Without hesitation, First Sergeant Koontz and two men of a security team maneuvered against the enemy bunker. Despite being the target of a heavy volume of hostile fire, First Sergeant Koontz fearlessly crawled up to the bunker and threw in a hand grenade. The enemy tossed the grenade from the bunker, but the alert and determined First Sergeant Koontz threw the grenade back into the bunker. First Sergeant Koontz's dauntless courage and gallant actions while engaged in close combat against a numerically superior hostile force reflect great credit upon him and his unit; and

WHEREAS, upon his retirement on July 31, 1972, with over 20 years total active service in the United States Army, Sergeant Koontz's decorations, medals, badges and commendations included the Purple Heart, Silver Star with 2<sup>nd</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device and 6<sup>th</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation Medal with 3<sup>rd</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster, Good Conduct Medal with 6<sup>th</sup> Award, Valorous Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Citation, Presidential Unit Citation, National Defense Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, Vietnam Campaign Medal with 60 Device, Vietnam Service Medal with six Service Stars, and four Overseas Service Bars; and

WHEREAS, the outstanding determination and courageous actions of First Sergeant Koontz were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and citizenship and reflect great credit upon him and Montgomery County; and

WHEREAS, the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners has petitioned this body to name a segment of State Route 374 (101st North Parkway) in their county in honor of First Sergeant Koontz to permanently commemorate his selfless sacrifice of personal safety and inspirational example in combat in Vietnam and his more than twenty years of meritorious service to the United States Army, so that we might enjoy the many bounties of democracy and the American way of life; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly most heartily concurs with this excellent proposal;  
now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the 2.85 mile segment of the extension of State Route 374 (101st North Parkway) in Montgomery County, Tennessee (Project Number 63374-2216-14) from such route's intersection with Dotsonville Road to its intersection with Dover Road is hereby designated the "Lawrence N. Koontz Parkway" as a lasting tribute to one of the most courageous, accomplished, and inspirational soldiers to ever call Tennessee home.

SECTION 2. The Department of Transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating the segment of State Route 374 described in Section 1 as the "Lawrence N. Koontz Parkway".

SECTION 3. The erection of such directional signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

SECTION 4. This act shall become operative only if the federal highway administrator advises the commissioner of transportation in writing that the provisions of this act shall not render Tennessee in violation of federal laws and regulations and subject to penalties prescribed therein.

SECTION 5. This act shall become operative only if the cost of the manufacture and installation of such signs is paid to the department of transportation from non-state funds within one (1) year of the effective date of this act. Such payment shall be made prior to any expenditure by the state for the manufacture or installation of such signs. The department shall return any unused portion of the estimated cost to the person or entity paying for such signs within thirty (30) days of the erection of such signs. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost, an amount equal to the difference in such costs shall be remitted to the department in non-

state funds within thirty (30) days of the sponsoring person or entity receiving an itemized invoice of the actual cost from the department.

SECTION 6. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.